



Homicides are up, but GOP misleads with claims about blame

By DAVID KLEPPER
and GARY FIELDS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — “SKYROCKETING MURDER RATES,” claimed the National Fraternal Order of Police. “An explosion of violent crime,” said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. “Democrat-run cities across the country who cut funding for police have seen increases in crime,” tweeted U.S. Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C. On social media and in political speeches, some Republicans and pro-police groups say last year’s calls to slash spending on law enforcement have led to a dramatic rise in killings in cities overseen by Democrats.

The increases they cite are

real, and several big cities did make cuts to police spending. But the reductions were mostly modest, and the same big increases in homicides are being seen nationwide — even in cities that increased police spending. At the same time, the rates for burglaries, drug offenses and many other types of crime are down in many cities across the country. The effort to blame Democrats for crime may offer a preview of Republicans’ strategy for upcoming elections: a new twist on an old “law and order” argument from the party’s past, harkening back to President Richard Nixon.

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In this Oct. 14, 2020, file photo a protester holds a sign that reads “Defund Police” during a rally for the late George Floyd outside Barclays Center in New York.

Associated Press

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Homicides are up, but GOP misleads with claims about blame

Continued from Front

Just as it did half a century ago, the argument ignores the complicated reasons for fluctuations in crime rates — a list that today includes the upheaval wrought by the coronavirus pandemic and protests that erupted after the killing of George Floyd by police. "2020 was just a crazy complicated year where lots of things happened, and

there are lots of potential explanations for why we saw these big changes," said David Abrams, a University of Pennsylvania Law School professor, who tracks crime rates and is studying the impact of the pandemic. The bottom line? "It's complicated." Late last month, the National Fraternal Order of Police posted a graphic on social media showing big increases in the homicide

rate in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Portland, Oregon — all cities currently led by Democrats. "The leadership in all of these cities turned the keys over to the 'Defund the Police' mob," the post read. The numbers in it were alarming: Homicides in Chicago, up by 22% through late May compared with the same period last year.

In Minneapolis, homicides were up by 56%; in Portland, 800%. Top Republicans have taken up the claim, too. "Look at what's happening where they're defunding the police," former President Donald Trump said Saturday at the North Carolina GOP convention, echoing an argument he made on the campaign trail last year. "The crime rate is going up by 50, 60, 100%, 131% in one city."

Killings have been on the rise since 2020, but the numbers don't tell the whole story about reductions in police spending or a troubling increase in homicides being seen throughout the country. Last year in Minneapolis, city officials shifted \$8 million — less than 5% of the police budget — to programs focused on community mental health and violence prevention. In February, they approved \$6.4 million to hire new police officers after an unprecedented number of officers retired or went on extended medical leave following Floyd's killing. In Portland, homicides were up from six in the first five months of 2020 to 38 in the first five months of 2021, according to city police data, a more than 530% increase. That's lower than the 800% increase claimed by the Fraternal Order of Police, which said it was based on homicides through May 25. The city, a center of defund police efforts, trimmed its police budget last year by less than 4%, far short of the \$50 million in cuts sought by activists. This year, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, a Democrat, has sought greater funds for programs targeting gun violence, which he said is a national problem. "It has reached crisis proportions," he said in March. Los Angeles and Chicago have also seen double-digit increases in their homicide rates this year, and they did reduce spending on police. Chicago cut its police budget by 3%, largely by eliminating vacant positions. Los Angeles reduced spending on police by about 5% overall. Yet homicide rates are also increasing in cities that didn't cut spending. In Houston, a city led by a Democratic mayor, killings have increased, but so, too, has funding for police. Nashville, Tennessee, also led by a Democratic mayor, increased the police budget but has seen homicides spike 50% so far this year over last. □

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Senators eye \$579B in new infrastructure spending, \$1T plan

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan group of senators is eyeing an infrastructure deal with \$579 billion in new spending as negotiators try to strike a nearly \$1 trillion deal on President Joe Biden's top priority, according to those briefed on the plan.

The 10 senators have been huddling behind closed doors, encouraged by Biden to keep working on the effort after he walked away from a Republican-only proposal this week unable to resolve differences. The senators are briefing their colleagues privately and cautioned changes could still be made.

"Our group — comprised of 10 Senators, 5 from each party — has worked in good faith and reached a bipartisan agreement on a realistic, compromise framework to modernize our nation's infrastructure and energy technologies," the senators said in a joint statement.

"This investment would be fully paid for and not include tax increases," they added. "We are discussing our approach with our



Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, is surrounded by reporters as he walks to the Senate chamber for votes, at the Capitol in Washington, Thursday, June 10, 2021.

Associated Press

respective colleagues, and the White House, and remain optimistic that this can lay the groundwork to garner broad support from both parties and meet America's infrastructure needs." The president and Congress have been straining to reach an agreement on his ideas for an infrastructure investment, stuck over the scope of the package of road, highway and other projects and how to pay for it. Lawmakers say the group's tentative agreement represents important progress in fashioning a bill that can pass such an evenly divided

Congress this year, but they are also aware that it could easily unravel.

At that size, the new package spread over five years would be more than the previous Republican-only effort of \$330 billion in new spending in a \$928 billion package, but still short of the \$1.7 trillion over eight years Biden is seeking. It appears the group is running into the same problems that Biden and lead Republican negotiator Sen. Shelley Moore Capito confronted in agreeing on how to pay for it.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., a lead negotiator, would not

disclose the final tab. Asked if the new spending was at \$600 billion, he said "the president said that was his goal. So I don't think anybody felt like they had to exceed his goal."

Another member of the group, Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., said they are "fairly close" on a topline amount, but are still debating how to pay for it. One option is to include potential revenue from uncollected income taxes, he said.

"We still have to talk," Tester said. One Republican not in the group, Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana, said he was told the package would provide nearly \$1 trillion — including \$579 billion in new spending over the baseline for transportation projects.

Braun also said parts of it would be paid for with untapped COVID-19 relief funds, which has been a nonstarter for the White House.

"They have come up with similar to what I think Capito was working on, but my understanding is it would be a little more money," he said.

Biden tasked the senators to keep working as he set

out for his first overseas trip after talks collapsed this week with Capito and the GOP senators.

The president is seeking a sweeping investment in not just roads, highways and bridges but also broadband, electric vehicle charging stations and other aspects of what he views as the new economy, paid for with a hike in the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%.

Republicans prefer a more narrow focus on fixing existing transportation systems, with more modest investments elsewhere. They oppose any tax hikes to pay for the new spending.

With the Senate narrowly split, 50-50, and most legislation requiring 60 votes to advance past a filibuster, Biden is seeking a bipartisan agreement to ensure passage. At the same time, he is also instructing Democrats who control the House and Senate to prepare to pass portions of the package on their own, under special budget rules that enable approval with 51 votes in the Senate.

In the evenly-divided Senate, Vice President Kamala Harris serves as a tie-breaking vote. □

Message in a jacket: Jill Biden offers 'love' during UK trip

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and AAMER MADHANI

Associated Press

CARBIS BAY, England (AP)

— Jill Biden is sending a sartorial message of "love" as she accompanies her husband President Joe Biden overseas.

The first lady wore a black jacket with the word "love" outlined on the back in silver beading as she and the president met with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his wife Thursday. She wore the same jacket more than two years ago to kick off Biden's presidential campaign.

"We're bringing love from America," she told reporters, explaining her fashion choice.

"This is a global conference and we are trying

to bring unity across the globe and I think it's needed right now, that people feel a sense of unity from all the countries and feel a sense hope after this year of the pandemic."

Biden is known for her sartorial choices, often donning bright pastels or eye-catching patterns for her outings on behalf of the Biden administration. She is rarely seen without a kitten heel or stiletto boot, adding height to her petite frame.

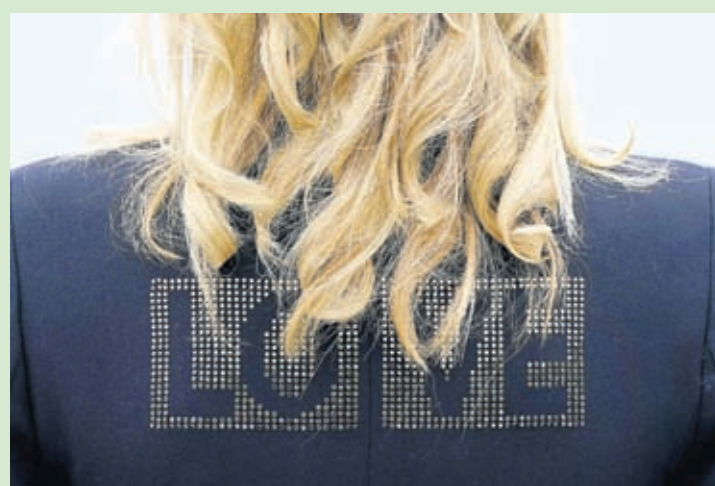
And this isn't the first time she's sent a direct message with her clothes: During a campaign trip to Iowa late last year, Biden wore black skinny jeans bearing the word "VOTE" down each calf.

Biden's jacket and pants come in contrast to the

last first lady to offer a message with her clothes: Melania Trump wore a jacket that read "I Really Don't Care, Do U?" during a trip to a detention center for migrant children in 2018. She wore a different jacket at the shelter.

The first lady is accompanying her husband during the U.K. leg of his foreign trip, where she'll participate in spouses' activities at the Group of Seven summit, and a couple of events focused on military veterans and their families. She joined Johnson's wife, Carrie Johnson, for tea Thursday.

It marks Biden's first overseas visit as president. Along with his participation in the G-7 summit and a NATO summit in Brussels, he will meet with Russian



First lady Jill Biden turns around to show the word "love" on the back of her jacket as she speaks with reporters after visiting with Carrie Johnson, wife of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, ahead of the G-7 summit, Thursday, June 10, 2021, in Carbis Bay, England.

Associated Press

President Vladimir Putin. Biden said her husband had been "studying for weeks" for the trip and joked that he is "over-prepared."

"Joe loves foreign policy.

This is his forte," she said. The Bidens are set to meet with Queen Elizabeth II on Sunday at Windsor Castle. The first lady told reporters "that's an exciting part of the visit for us." □

Wife of drug kingpin 'El Chapo' pleads guilty to U.S. charges

By **MICHAEL BALSAMO**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The wife of Mexican drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman pleaded guilty Thursday to charges in the U.S. and admitted that she helped her husband run his multibillion-dollar criminal empire. Emma Coronel Aispuro, wearing a green jail uniform, appeared in federal court in Washington and pleaded guilty to three federal offenses as part of a plea deal with federal prosecutors.

The charges include knowingly and willfully conspiring to distribute heroin, cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine for several years. She also pleaded guilty to a money-laundering conspiracy charge and to engaging in transactions with a foreign narcotics trafficker.

The 31-year-old was arrested in February at Dulles International Airport in Virginia and has been jailed since then. "She is very happy to put this behind her," Coronel Aispuro's attorney, Jeffrey Lichtman, said outside the courthouse. "She didn't expect to get arrested after her husband received



In this July 17, 2019 file photo, Emma Coronel Aispuro, center, wife of Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, arrives for his sentencing at Brooklyn federal court, in New York.

Associated Press

life in prison. So, this is obviously a troubling time. But we're going to get past it." Prosecutors have alleged Coronel Aispuro "worked closely with the command-and-control structure" of the Sinaloa cartel and conspired to distribute large quantities of drugs, knowing they would be smuggled into the U.S.

As Mexico's most powerful drug lord, Guzman ran a

cartel responsible for smuggling cocaine and other drugs into the United States during his 25-year reign, prosecutors say. They also said his "army of sicarios," or "hit men," was under orders to kidnap, torture and kill anyone who got in his way.

The prosecutor, Anthony Nardozi, said his wife had "aided and abetted" the Sinaloa cartel's objectives

to smuggle drugs into the U.S. and helped to import more than 450,000 kilograms of cocaine, 90,000 kilograms of heroin, 45,000 kilograms of methamphetamine and about 90,000 kilograms of marijuana. Lichtman insisted that Coronel Aispuro was a "very minimal participant" in the drug empire. "She was a very small part of this much larger thing," he said

Her arrest earlier this year was a surprise in part because authorities had made no move to arrest her over the past two years, even after she was implicated in her husband's crimes. During Guzman's trial in 2019, prosecutors said she helped orchestrate Guzman's two prison breaks in Mexico.

Nardozi said Coronel Aispuro "served as a go-between" to deliver messages to cartel members after her husband was arrested and also conspired with Guzman's sons to "plan and coordinate" his prison escapes.

Coronel Aispuro listened quietly as prosecutors described how they could prove her illegal activity if she chose to go to trial.

"Yes," she said through a translator, when asked by the judge if she had actually committed the crimes the government described. Lichtman said his client did not agree to cooperate with federal investigators but hoped she would receive below a statutory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison when she is due back in court in September for sentencing. □

Wildfires smolder across dry, drought-stricken Southwest



In this photo provided by Rusty Bowers, Arizona House Speaker Rusty Bowers walks through the remains of his family's weekend home on Tuesday, June 8, 2021, that was destroyed by a wildfire the day before.

Associated Press

By **TERRY TANG**
Associated Press

A wildfire in Arizona that had neighboring New Mexico breathing in smoke was one of several blazes scorching the drought-

stricken Southwest, signaling what could be a devastating summer.

Residents in New Mexico's largest city woke up Wednesday shrouded again in smoke from the

Arizona fires. The yellow haze stretched up the Rio Grande Valley and obscured views of the mountain ranges surrounding Albuquerque.

Firefighters in Superior, Arizona, a former mining town about 60 miles (97 kilometers) east of Phoenix, however, made significant progress overnight on the so-called Telegraph Fire. They contained 21% of the fire's perimeter, up from zero the night before, officials said.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey plans to visit the area Thursday. He will take an aerial tour of the fire site and stop at a shelter. He previously issued an emergency declaration for that fire and another several miles east. The declaration will make up to \$400,000

available for response efforts. More than 750 firefighters conducted burn-out operations through the night. Crews overseen by a top-tier management team focused on establishing a fire break along U.S. 60 and in the Pinal Mountains.

The blaze has burned more than 125 square miles (324 square kilometers) in Pinal and Gila counties. It was first reported Friday and is believed to be human-caused. Thousands of residents have been stuck in various stages of the evacuation process. At least 2,500 homes in Gila County have been evacuated, with twice that number set to go with bags packed, according to county emergency officials. Hundreds more

also were cleared from their homes in a community in Pinal County. A second home near Globe-Miami that belonged to Arizona House Speaker Rusty Bowers was among those destroyed. The fire also forced closures on most roads leading out of town. But U.S. 70 reopened Wednesday. Besides enduring smoke from Arizona fires, New Mexico is dealing with its own blazes, including one that was sparked by lightning three weeks ago in the Gila National Forest in the western part of the state. It has charred more than 71 square miles (184 square kilometers) and has forced the closure of the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and much of the surrounding wilderness. □

Israel's Netanyahu lashes out as end of his era draws near

By JOSEF FEDERMAN

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In what appear to be the final days of his historic 12-year rule, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not leaving the political stage quietly.

The longtime leader is accusing his opponents of betraying their voters, and some have needed special security protection.

Netanyahu says he is the victim of a "deep state" conspiracy. He speaks in apocalyptic terms when talking about the country without his leadership.

"They are uprooting the good and replacing it with the bad and dangerous," Netanyahu told the conservative Channel 20 TV station this week. "I fear for the destiny of the nation."

Such language has made for tense days as Netanyahu and his loyalists make a final desperate push to try to prevent a new government from taking office on Sunday. With his options running out, it has also provided a preview of Netanyahu as opposition leader. For those who have watched Netanyahu dominate Israeli politics for much of the past quarter century, his recent behavior is familiar.

He frequently describes threats both large and small in stark terms. He has belittled his rivals and thrived by using divide-and-conquer tactics. He paints his Jewish opponents as weak, self-hating "leftists," and Arab politicians as a potential fifth column of terrorist sympathizers. He routinely presents himself in grandiose terms as the only person capable of leading the country through its never-ending security challenges.

"Under his term, identity politics are at an all-time high," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, a non-partisan think tank.

It is a formula that has served Netanyahu well. He has led the right-wing Likud party with an iron fist for over 15 years, racking up a string of electoral victories

that earned him the nickname, "King Bibi."

He fended off pressure by

tion has been cool to the Israeli leader, while Netanyahu's close relation-

came up — another legacy of Netanyahu, who has pushed the issue to the

hunt" fueled by "fake news," and in the TV interview he said he was being hounded by the "deep state."

His supporters have held threatening rallies outside the homes of lawmakers joining the new government. Some of the parliamentarians say they and their families have received death threats, and one said she was recently followed by a mysterious car. Netanyahu's ultra-Orthodox partners have meanwhile cast Bennett as a threat to their religion, with one even calling on him to remove his kippa, the skullcap worn by observant Jews.

Online incitement by Netanyahu's followers has grown so bad that several members of the incoming government were assigned bodyguards or even moved to secret locations. Some Israelis have drawn comparisons to the tensions that led to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in January, while others have pointed to the incitement ahead of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

In a rare public statement, Nadav Argaman, the head of the Shin Bet internal security agency, recently warned of a "serious rise and radicalization in violent and inciting discourse" on social media that he said could lead to violence.

Netanyahu has condemned the incitement while noting that he too has been a target.

Gayil Talshir, a political scientist at Hebrew University, said she expects the coming months to remain volatile.

"We're going to see a very assertive and aggressive head of the opposition, meaning Netanyahu, determined to make sure that this coalition of change would be a short-lived one and that we will have another election as soon as possible," she added.

"We don't have even a memory of what normal politics looks like," Talshir said. □



In this June 6, 2021 file photo, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks at a ceremony showing appreciation to the health care system for their contribution to the fight against the coronavirus, in Jerusalem.

Associated Press

President Barack Obama to make concessions to the Palestinians and publicly defied him in 2015 by delivering a speech in Congress against the U.S.-led nuclear agreement with Iran.

Although Netanyahu was unable to block the deal, he was richly rewarded by President Donald Trump, who recognized contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital, pulled out of the nuclear agreement and helped broker historic diplomatic pacts between Israel and four Arab nations.

Netanyahu has waged what appears to be a highly successful shadow war against Iran while keeping Israel's longstanding conflict with the Palestinians at a slow boil, with the exception of three brief wars with Gaza's militant Hamas rulers.

The situation with the Palestinians today is "remarkably the same" as when Netanyahu took office, Plesner said. "No major changes in either direction, no annexation and no diplomatic breakthroughs."

But some of Netanyahu's tactics now appear to be coming back to haunt him. The new Biden administra-

ship with Trump has alienated large segments of the Democratic Party.

At home, Netanyahu's magic also has dissipated — in large part due to his trial on corruption charges. He has lashed out at an ever-growing list of perceived enemies: the media, the judiciary, police, centrists, leftists and even hard-line nationalists who were once close allies.

In four consecutive elections since 2019, the once-invincible Netanyahu was unable to secure a parliamentary majority. Facing the unappealing possibility of a fifth consecutive election, eight parties managed to assemble a majority coalition that is set to take office on Sunday.

Israeli politics are usually split between dovish, left-wing parties that seek a negotiated agreement with the Palestinians, and religious and nationalist parties — long led by Netanyahu — that oppose Palestinian independence. If any of the recent elections had centered on the conflict, then right-wing parties alone would have formed a strong, stable majority.

But the Palestinians hardly

sidelines.

Instead, all anyone seemed to talk about was Netanyahu's personality and his legal troubles, which proved to be deeply polarizing. The incoming government includes three small parties led by former Netanyahu aides who had bitter breakups with him, including the presumed prime minister, Naftali Bennett.

Bennett and his right-wing partners even broke a longstanding taboo on allying with Arab parties. A small Islamist party, which Netanyahu had also courted, is to be the first to join a ruling coalition.

Netanyahu and his followers in Likud have grown increasingly desperate. Initially, Netanyahu tried to lure some "defectors" from his former allies to prevent them from securing a parliamentary majority.

When that failed, he resorted to language similar to that of his friend and benefactor Trump.

"We are witnesses to the greatest election fraud in the history of the country," Netanyahu claimed at a Likud meeting this week. He has long dismissed the corruption trial as a "witch

Lawyers urge ICC to probe alleged crimes against Uyghurs

By **MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A group of lawyers

presented a dossier of evidence Thursday to prosecutors at the International Criminal Court that they say establishes jurisdiction for the global tribunal to investigate allegations Chinese authorities are involved in grave crimes targeting Uyghurs, a largely Muslim ethnic group.

The move is the latest attempt by international human rights lawyers to get an investigation started at the Hague-based court into allegations of atrocities against Uyghurs by China, which is not a member of the court.

In a statement, the lawyers said their dossier establishes "that Uyghurs have been targeted, rounded up, forcibly disappeared and deported from Tajikistan" back into China's western Xinjiang region "by Chinese operatives."

They argue that "Chinese authorities have directly intervened in Tajikistan. The ICC therefore has jurisdiction over these ac-



This Wednesday, March 31, 2021 file photo shows the exterior view of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands.

tions which start in Tajikistan and continue into China" and urge ICC prosecutors to open an investigation "without delay."

The filing seeks to use the legal precedent of an investigation opened by the ICC into allegations of mass deportations and persecution of Rohingya people by Myanmar forces that

forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya across the border into neighboring Bangladesh.

Myanmar is not a member of the court, but Bangladesh is. In the Rohingya case, a panel of ICC judges ruled in 2019 that the court "may exercise jurisdiction over crimes when part of the criminal conduct takes

place on the territory of a State Party."

In July last year, lawyers representing exiled Uyghur activists asked the ICC to investigate the forced repatriation of thousands of Uyghurs from Cambodia and Tajikistan and alleged genocide in Xinjiang.

In a report issued in December, ICC prosecutors said

that "there was no basis to proceed at this time" with an investigation into the allegations.

The lawyers who submitted the dossier Thursday say their findings are based on witness testimonies and investigations in countries including ICC member Tajikistan. An estimated 1 million people or more — most of them Uyghurs — have been confined in re-education camps in China's western Xinjiang region in recent years, according to researchers. Chinese authorities have been accused of imposing forced labor, systematic forced birth control, torture and separating children from incarcerated parents.

Beijing rejects allegations that it is committing crimes. Officials have characterized the camps, which they say are now closed, as vocational training centers to teach the Chinese language, job skills and the law to support economic development and combat extremism. China saw a wave of Xinjiang-related terror attacks through 2016. □

Associated Press

EU lawmakers say Morocco put children's lives at risk

By **LORNE COOK**

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union lawmakers on Thursday accused Morocco of endangering the lives of children in an attempt to put political pressure on Spain, after more than 8,000 people tried to cross into Spain's North African

enclave of Ceuta last month.

In a 397-to-85 resolution with 196 abstentions, the lawmakers urged the government in Rabat and the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, to rapidly finalize a "re-admission" agreement so migrants can in the future be

returned legally.

They say 1,200 unaccompanied minors were among those who tried to enter Ceuta by scaling a border fence or swimming around it.

Morocco has since taken back most of the migrants. Entering the enclave put them in EU territory, where they could try to apply for asylum.

The surge of migrants took place after Spain agreed to provide medical treatment for the Sahrawi leader heading the fight for an independent Western Sahara, which was annexed by Morocco in the 1970s. Rabat reacted furiously and recalled its ambassador in Madrid.

The lawmakers rejected "Morocco's use of border control and migration, and unaccompanied mi-

nors in particular, as political pressure" against an EU nation. They deplored that children and families had been involved in the crossing, "putting their lives and safety at clear risk."

In the nonbinding resolution, they urged Spain and Morocco to work closely together to allow for the repatriation of the children to their families, acting in the best interests of the child and respecting national and international law.

The Associated Press and other media witnessed several incidents in which the Spanish authorities in Ceuta sent many migrants who did make it in back to Morocco, including a lot of children.

Human rights organizations say those actions are illegal.

The resolution suggested that Moroccan authorities were complicit in transporting the minors. It said that "most of the children were wrongly led to believe that star footballers were playing in a match with free entrance in the city of Ceuta, and that they were on a school excursion."

No evidence was provided by the parliament. AP has been unable to independently verify whether this was true and Moroccan authorities have repeatedly rejected those claims.

The EU lawmakers also expressed regrets about the damage to ties with a near neighbor who has a good track record of cooperation with the 27-nation bloc on trade, counter-terrorism and drug trafficking. □



Spanish children play on the beach near the border fence separating Spain and Morocco in the district of Benu, Spanish enclave of Ceuta, Thursday, June 3, 2021.

Associated Press

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New company, same woes: Puerto Rico suffers power outages



In this Oct. 19, 2017 file photo, Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority workers repair distribution lines damaged by Hurricane Maria in the Cantera community of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Associated Press

By DÁNICA COTO

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico
(AP) — A private company

that took over power transmission and distribution in Puerto Rico this month has struggled with widespread outages and growing anger. Officials say outages have affected more than 1 million customers so far this month, and thousands remained without electricity on Thursday. Several mayors declared a state of emergency as they distributed ice and generators to those most in need.

Many in Puerto Rico hoped for a quick improvement in service, but many complain it has gotten even worse in Luma's first few days of operations — with problems complicated by heavy rains this week.

"This has turned into chaos," said Javier Jiménez, mayor of the western town of San Sebastián, which had established its own bri-

gade of workers to make repairs after Hurricane Maria largely destroyed the U.S. territory's electrical grid in 2017, leaving some people without electricity for nearly a year. Jiménez said he was forced to activate that brigade once again this week because Luma Energy, which took over the transmission and distribution system of Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority on June 1 told him it did not have enough manpower to restore electricity to the more than 1,000 families left in the dark over the weekend in his town. "I could not believe it," he said. "A company that has been here just days..." Jiménez also noted that Puerto Ricans have complained that when they call the company, they are placed on hold for hours with no response.

A Luma spokeswoman did not return a message for comment, while a com-

pany representative, José Pérez, told local radio stations that the outages could be acts of sabotage or instances of too many people using the system at one time. Government officials have urged patience, noting that Luma only just took over a system running on rickety infrastructure, much of it patched together after Hurricane Maria.

In early June, Luma CEO Wayne Stensby told reporters that the company had more than 350 line workers and that the number was sufficient. On Tuesday, Luma issued a statement urging municipal officials and private contractors to stop trying to fix the system independently, saying that such efforts were illegal and dangerous.

"Luma is aware of the outages affecting communities across Puerto Rico and working safely and strategically to restore power across the island," it said. But many customers are seething, including José Aquino, a 38-year-old gymnastics instructor who said he and his family have been without power for 14 hours at a time on several occasions this week.

His father is a diabetic and had to throw away his insulin before buying a small cooler to store it on ice.

"He hasn't had to do that since (Hurricane) Maria," Aquino said, adding that neither he nor his wife have been able to report the outages to Luma. "They don't answer." □



Residents walk along a dirt road in the Urus del Lago Poopo indigenous community, which sits along the salt-crusted former shoreline of Lake Poopo, in Punaca, Bolivia, Monday, May 24, 2021.

Associated Press

Bolivia's 'People of the Water' try to survive loss of lake

By CARLOS VALDEZ

Associated Press

PUNACA TINTA MARIA, Bolivia (AP) — For many generations, the homeland of the Uru people here wasn't land at all: It was the brackish waters of Lake Poopo. The Uru "people of the water" would build a sort of family island of reeds when they married and would survive on what they could harvest from the broad, shallow lake in the highlands of southwestern Bolivia. "They collected eggs, fished, hunted flamingos and birds. When they fell in love, the couple built their own raft," said Abdón Choque, leader of Punaca, a town of some 180 people.

Now what was Bolivia's second-largest lake is gone. It dried up about five years ago, victim of shrinking glaciers, water diversions for farming and contamination. Ponds reappear in places during the rainy season.

And the Uru of Lake Poopo are left clinging to its salt-crusted former shoreline in three small settlements, 635 people scrabbling for ways to make a living and struggling to save even their culture.

Not long before the lake was lost, the language of the Uru-Cholo had perished as well. The last native speakers gradually died and younger generations grew up schooled in Spanish and working in other, more common Indigenous languages, Aymara and Quechua. To save their identities, the communities are trying to revive that language — or at least its closest sibling. Aided by the government and a local foundation, they have invited teachers from a related branch of the Uru, the Uru-Chipaya near the Chilean border to the west, to teach that tongue — one of 36 officially recognized Bolivian languages — to their children. □

LOCAL



NOORD — Tuscany Residence Aruba is found in one of the most popular neighborhoods of Aruba, close to the shopping and nightlife of Palm Beach, and best of all it is within walking distance of the finest white beaches and clear blue ocean. Tuscany Residence Aruba brings luxury living to a new level.

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We take care of it all

De Groot adds, "Our project is in continuous construction which builds confidence. Aside of the town houses and villa you can see the community pool now, providing you with the idea of style and quality of our residence." He continues saying that maintenance, property management, rental program and safety are taken care of. "You can log in from abroad and manage your property for rental or view your administration." The great thing about Tuscany is that it offers everything equal to a resort but you do not need to wait for an elevator to bring you up,

Welcome to Tuscany Residence Aruba: Aruba's Luxury Residential Resort

worry about parking space or noisy neighbors. "We have got space and different size offerings making this more a community feel rather than a packed condo building." He also emphasizes that the location is one of the best on Aruba as it is quiet and close to Palm Beach.



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Because music is for everyone

ORANJESTAD — Originally, music plays a very important role in the culture of Aruba. In schools, however, creative subjects such as art and music have come last and more importance is now attached to language and math lessons. The initiative that Leerorkest Nederland, learning orchestra, took a few years ago, and has now also brought to the Caribbean islands, aims to change this. We are convinced that creative subjects such as making music together are just as important as learning to count, write and read. Due to their home situation, many children often do not have the opportunity to take music lessons and / or learn to play an instrument. The Stichting Leerorkest Aruba would very much like to change this and together with the Leerorkest Nederland has made a start on Aruba.

A musical and social project

Leerorkest Aruba aims to give all children in Aruba the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument, during and after school. It has now been scientifically proven that making music together is not only fun, but also very good for the total development of children. In this way they learn to work together, to build more self-confidence, but in addition, their creativity is stimulated, their brain learns to make other connections and they learn to listen to each other in a positive way, to take each other into account and to help each other. 'Music education has been shown to have a positive influence on IQ, learning performance, word analy-

sis and phonological skills. There is also preliminary evidence that music education can facilitate the learning of foreign languages.'

Quote from the chapter 'The value of arts education. Allegations and Evidences' (Ellen Winner, Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin).

Accessible structure

By introducing a Learning Orchestra in the schools, we can set up an accessible structure within the schools so that all children have a chance to discover and develop their musical talents. The advantage is that the lessons will initially take place during school time.

Children receive weekly lessons from a passionate music teacher. A start is made with General Musical Education Lessons and this is gradually extended to the method of the Learning Orchestra: playing together on instruments in a real orchestra!

Children learn in a playful and fast way to learn to play the violin, cello, trumpet, trombone, flute or clarinet and then play together in a class orchestra! The organization of the Leerorkest in Aruba is in the hands of the local organization Stichting Leerorkest Aruba (foundation: October 2019).

Music for ALL Children

Aruba has three major school boards, namely DPS (Public Schools Service), SKOA (Foundation for Catholic Education Aruba) and SPCOA (Foundation for Protestant Christian Education Aruba).

In total there are about 41 regular primary schools in Aruba. Stichting Leerorkest

Aruba hopes to one day be able to introduce the Leerorkest to all primary schools. Leerorkest Aruba started a pilot on September 23, 2019 at four primary schools (three from SKOA and 1 from DPS). The instrument lessons are also given at two schools.

The headmasters and teachers are very enthusiastic that music lessons are finally coming back to school in the form of a Learning Orchestra!

Leerorkest Aruba has chosen to start in the 2nd class with a preparatory series of general musical education, and to start in the 3rd class with the lessons on the instruments. We believe



that children who have a good basic musical education learn to play the instruments faster.

Due to the challenges of the Corona virus, it has been decided to start in the 2020-2021 school year with online lessons in general musical education. If the schools are (temporarily) closed, these lessons can in any case be continued within the home school.

Nora Eleonora, director of DPS, wholeheartedly endorses the goals of the Learning Orchestra. She is very happy with the start of the pilot project at one of their schools and hopes that the project will spread to other schools within the DPS board. About 25% of the primary schools on the island come under the DPS board.

Recently, a very positive consultation took place between Anuesca Baily of SKOA and Leerorkest Aruba, in which SKOA has indicated that they would like to start with the general musical education programme presented by the Leerorkest at all their schools (with about 7,000 children in total!). Finally the goal of the Leerorkest is getting closer: to offer music for ALL children. □





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Pering's Vice President for International Operation Alberto Perret Gentil: "With us you stay close to the ocean to live your dream"

ORANJESTAD — We interviewed Pering's Vice President for International Operation Alberto Perret Gentil from his apartment at Blue Residences.

The Perret Group has been in real estate development in Aruba for quite some time now. How do you see the real estate market in Aruba moving forward?

Pering is a 70 year old company founded by our father and a close friend back in 1950 and this is our 20th year anniversary in Aruba. We feel nowadays like Arubans and are very thankful to Aruba and its people for welcoming us when we had to move part of our business from our native Venezuela. Irwin my brother has been at the helm of the company for some 35 years and I have been responsible for the Aruba operation since I moved here with my family 14 years ago.

Going back to your question. Aruba is a two tier market; the tourist market and the local market. The tourist real estate market is booming because many people from the USA and Canada learned how to work from afar; from their dream destination via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. It has been the best year of our history sales wise. We expect prices on this segment to go up given the high demand and also the increase in construction prices of 15%-20% worldwide. Prices in the US already increased and Aruba's are still lagging. We are seeing also a new trend of people looking for villas and larger formats like 3BRs, 4BRs and Penthouses with one of the rooms turned into a home office now that they want to spend more time "workationing" from here.

Regarding the Aruban local market we expect more supply coming as some people unfortunately won't be able to pay their mortgaged loans given the economic hardships of the last year not allowing allow prices to increase. But there is a moratorium by the Government on condominium developments.

Since December 2018. I personally think is not warranted. I have heard there are 1000 condos on the pipeline since we got here in 2001, but the reality is different. Look around how many have been built since or how many are currently under construction, 70?, 100 tops?. If you compare the number of vacation condominiums of for example Miami, Puerto Rico or Turks & Caycos vis a vis hotel/timeshare rooms Aruba has proportionately way less. And condominiums are great for the economy; its GDP, in general targeting high income individuals that spend on the island, pay its taxes in addition to the 6% transfer tax on purchase price they must paid to the Government and with very little if any pressure on more immigration.

Why did you choose to live in Blue If you are also the developer of Oceania, Azure and Harbour House.

Each project has its own magic; Oceania has Eagle Beach, one of the very best in the world, Harbour House amazing city and ocean views and the downtown living experience and in



Azure I like the lobby/restaurant and pool areas. Don't tell anyone but Blue is my favorite!! I like the expansive landscaped areas and the views toward Eagle Beach from my terrace. It has a more tranquil, private and a more easygoing ambiance. We just installed a new whirlpool, will soon commence works on the Prikichi Lounge at the lobby area and hopefully will finally get the permit for the beach bar across the street by the name of "Laama", an exclusive beach gathering space with tapas and drinks by Chef Urvin Croes from the Dejavu Group.

Also worth mentioning Infini, competing for the best restaurant in Aruba with Lima Bistro, soon to open at Harbour House. A new spa operator, state of the art fitness center, tennis and beach tennis facilities among others.

But lately we see many penthouses for sale?

That is correct and a great opportunity by the way. Our original owners were mostly wealthy Venezuelans. Many recently moved their permanent residence to Europe and the US and cannot enjoy their "weekend getaway". And currently Venezuelans have restrictions to enter

Aruba and thus rather sell. I bought my PH in a resale recently.

Large format units are selling like hotcakes in Aruba, people that decided to work from their dream destination and with the best internet in the Caribbean. Workation is here to stay. I personally love the interior design of Blue Residences 3BRs or 5 BRs penthouses, its big balconies overlooking the ocean where we gather with friends and family almost weekly for BBQ or paella, its vaulted ceilings and double the ocean views as it has two levels.

What keeps you busy these days?

Working on a new development opportunity we hope to announce shortly and staying busy with opening HarbourWalk, the ocean front retail area on Harbour House as well as re launching the "Pa Amor di Nos Aruba" PANA Foundation, our social responsibility arm. Should find more time to spend with wife and kids though.

Any final tip for a person looking to buy a second home in Aruba?

Stay close to the ocean!! ☐



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4 small-business innovations that will outlast the pandemic

By **RANDA KRISS**
of **NerdWallet**

Small businesses that survived the COVID-19 pandemic still face a long road to recovery, but some of the innovations business owners adopted last year may outlast the pandemic itself.

"If you make it through this, you ask, you learn, you adapt, and I think it only makes you stronger," says Keith Hall, president and CEO of the National Association for the Self-Employed. Here are four ways small businesses adapted in response to the pandemic that may have long-lasting effects on future operations, according to industry experts and business owners themselves.

1. CREATIVE BUSINESS MODELS

The pandemic forced businesses to find new ways to serve their customers — and quickly, says Meghan Cruz, director of grassroots advocacy at the National Retail Federation.

Now, that small-business owners have built out new infrastructure, like curbside pickup and e-commerce operations, they can continue using the hybrid business models they adopted during the pandemic, she says. Within a few weeks of the pandemic shutdowns, Keith Wallace, founder of the Wine School of Philadelphia, was facing possible bankruptcy. Unable to open the doors of his business's in-person-only classrooms, Wallace had to cancel wine classes for thousands of people.

"The only way to survive was to pivot," he said via email. "I realized this was the time to try something audacious."

Wallace repurposed his office into a recording studio, turned the main classroom into a video studio and taught himself how to produce and edit videos. By September 2020, the school launched its first online-only Level One Sommelier Course, an eight-week program.

By December, Wallace was able to recoup about 30% of the business's in-



Patrons are assisted while dining along a sidewalk on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill, N.C., Friday, April 16, 2021.

Associated Press

come through the online programs.

Now, he is working on launching three additional online programs nationally within the next year.

"This change is forever," he said.

2. INVESTMENT IN DIGITAL TOOLS

Prior to the pandemic, many small-business owners used technology as a secondary approach to business, according to Hall — but that shifted in 2020.

A 2020 Salesforce report found that growing small businesses were more likely to accelerate the pace of investing in technology due to the pandemic.

"Previously, we were a company that welcomed guests at our front counters with a handshake and a smile," Clark Twiddy, president of Twiddy & Company, a family-owned vacation rental company in the Outer Banks of North Carolina, said via email.

Twiddy said when the company closed its in-person counters due to COVID, investing in technology enabled them to "deliver Southern hospitality in a way never before imagined."

Twiddy & Company started using Salesforce for customer relationship management, scaled up its phone technology to Genesys, a cloud-based

system, and introduced an AI chatbot to help customers on its website.

3. RECONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Small businesses have long been an integral part of the communities they inhabit. And during the pandemic, Cruz says, business

owners stepped up to help those communities, even when they were in difficult positions themselves.

Cruz tells the story of Cardsmart Greetings, a small gift shop in Buffalo, New York, whose owner, Tracey Mangano, ran a hand sanitizer distribution

event in her community, despite her business being closed. Cardsmart was recognized by the National Retail Federation and the Quarte Retail Group as part of their Small Business Spotlight series.

Small businesses, Cruz says, "were able to be there for their communities when the communities needed them the most. And I think that trend will stay."

4. NEW OPPORTUNITIES

An April 2021 Federal Reserve report concludes that we're unlikely to understand exactly how many small businesses have closed their doors since the start of the pandemic until it's long behind us.

But on the other side of that coin: 4.3 million businesses were formed in 2020, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau. That represents a 24% increase in new businesses from 2019.

Not all of the growth over the past year can be attributed to people finding their entrepreneurial spirit, Hall says. □

U.S. budget deficit for current year hits record \$2.1 trillion

By **MARTIN CRUTSINGER**
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. budget deficit hit a record \$2.06 trillion through the first eight months of this budget year as coronavirus relief programs drove spending to all-time highs.

The shortfall this year is 9.7% higher than the \$1.88 trillion deficit run up over the same period a year ago, the Treasury Department said Wednesday in its monthly budget report.

The report showed that spending from October through May totaled a record \$4.67 trillion, up 19.7% from the same period a year ago. Government tax revenue was up 29.1% to \$2.61 trillion, compared to the same period a year ago. However, this year's figure was bolstered by tax payments made in May, a month later than the normal April deadline but a month earlier than last year's June deadline.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020 pushing 22 million people out of work, the government has responded even more forcefully with trillions of dollars in increased spending.

That support has included three rounds

of direct payments to individuals, with the last payments authorized in the \$1.9 trillion relief package that President Joe Biden pushed through Congress in March.

Other support programs provided billions of dollars in emergency unemployment benefits and forgivable loans.

The deficit for the budget year that ended Sept. 30 totaled a record \$3.1 trillion. Biden, who released his first budget earlier this month, is projecting that this year's deficit will total \$3.67 trillion and will remain above \$1 trillion every year over the next decade, reflecting his ambitious plans to boost spending on infrastructure and American families.

The annual federal deficit first topped \$1 trillion in 2009 and remained above that level for four years as a deep recession triggered by the 2008 financial crisis depressed tax revenues and led to increased government spending to fight the downturn.

The deficit in May totaled \$132 billion, compared to a deficit in May 2020 of \$398.8 billion that heavy spending on the initial pandemic relief programs and the delay of the tax deadline. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 38 Wed in haste
1 Massage target
5 Turkish title
9 Essays unit
11 Big pipes
13 Monopoly buy

DOWN 1 Friend of D'Artagnan
2 Catcher's position
3 Win big
4 Wide shoe
5 Fossil resin
6 Clip
7 Leave, so to speak
8 Pay to play
10 Ski event groups
12 Marshy grass
17 Outlaw
19 Spoken
22 — platter
(Polyne- sian menu choice)
24 "Without Me" singer
25 Speculate
26 Discussion
27 Dog's doc
28 Downfall
30 One who apportions
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ACTPOTTER
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LATER TABLE
ERASE OBOES
DELTS CONE

Yesterday's answer

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41

6-11

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

6-11

CRYPTOQUOTE

S ASU QN GSBUXZH AXXE SBOR

OTX HRGO XKZOT. S VKB GXXJ

SOH XBZUN. KBA QN HESZSOH

HRKZ. — TXJXB TKNXH

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO BURN A BOOK. AND THE WORLD IS FULL OF PEOPLE RUNNING ABOUT WITH LIT MATCHES. — RAY BRADBURY



David Limp, senior vice president of Devices and Services at Amazon, displays a new Echo, left, and an Echo Plus during an event announcing several new Amazon products by the company, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2017, in Seattle.

Associated Press

Own an Echo? Amazon may be helping itself to your bandwidth

By JOSEPH PISANI and MATT O'BRIEN AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Do you own an Amazon smart device? If so, odds are good that the company is already sharing your internet connection with your neighbors unless you've specifically told it not to.

On Tuesday, the company launched a program that forces users of many Echo smart speakers and Ring security cameras to automatically share a small portion of their home wireless bandwidth with neighbors. The only way to stop it is to turn it off yourself.

Amazon says the program, called Amazon Sidewalk, is a way to make sure lights, smart locks and other gadgets outside the home and out of reach of a Wi-Fi connection stay working. But some experts warn that the technology is so new that privacy and security risks remain unclear.

And almost no one seems happy that Amazon forced consumers into Amazon Sidewalk — or that many people may not know they can opt out of it.

DID AMAZON TELL CUSTOMERS THIS WAS HAPPENING?

Amazon says it sent emails to customers last month and in November that Sidewalk was coming. The company says you'll also get a notification when you set up gadgets that work with Sidewalk.

HOW CAN I STOP THIS?

Once you know about it, it's relatively straightforward, if not exactly simple, to opt out of Sidewalk.

Echo users can go into the Alexa app, tap "More" in the lower right hand corner, then tap "Settings," then "Account Settings," where they'll find a section for Amazon Sidewalk and a button to disable it. In the Ring app, go to "Control Center" and then tap "Sidewalk."

WHY IS AMAZON DOING THIS?

The idea behind Sidewalk is to integrate residential wireless connections into a "mesh network" that can extend coverage to areas home Wi-Fi can't reach. Amazon's Echo and Ring devices band together to create a this network by grabbing a slice of bandwidth from each cooperative home network. That can extend the range of devices designed to work with Sidewalk so they'll stay connected even when away from your home network.

Other products that work with Sidewalk include smart locks that can be controlled by phone and wearable devices that can track people with dementia who may wander. Amazon expects additional devices, including outdoor lights and motion detectors, will work with Sidewalk before long.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Amazon is tapping into a variety of radio technologies, including one called LoRa for its long range and better known for industrial and business applications such as keeping track of cattle roaming through pasturelands.

"The goal here is not to create coverage for a single home," said Marc Pegulu of chipmaker Semtech, which is partnering with Amazon on the technology. "It's kind of a shared network, a community shared network."

Among other things, devices connected to the shared network can supposedly search for the best signal in a way that can preserve their battery life.

Thomas Clausen, a computer science professor at France's École Polytechnique, says that the network Amazon is creating could be a good thing provided that it's open and accessible, because it would make it easier and cheaper to use internet-connected devices and sensors and spark new innovations.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Hackers could potentially infiltrate home networks via Sidewalk, said Eric Null, a policy manager at digital rights group Access Now. If that happens, Null said hackers could observe everything you do, take over your devices or access your files to steal information. □

UN: Climate and extinction crises must be tackled together



In this March 19, 2019 file photo, blades turn at a wind farm atop a hill behind a large tree in Canton, Maine.

By **SETH BORENSTEIN and CHRISTINA LARSON**
AP Science Writers

To save the planet, the world needs to tackle the crises of climate change and species loss together, taking measures that fix both and not just one, United Nations scientists said. A joint report Thursday by separate U.N. scientific bodies that look at climate change and biodiversity loss found there are ways to simultaneously attack the two global problems, but some fixes to warming could accelerate extinctions of plants and animals. For example, measures such as expansion of bio-energy crops like corn, or efforts to pull carbon dioxide from the air and bury it, could use so much land — twice the size of India — that the impact would be "fairly catastrophic on biodiversity," said co-author and biologist Almut Arneth at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany. Policy responses to climate change and biodiversity loss have long been siloed, with different government agencies responsible for each, said co-author Pamela McElwee, a human ecologist at Rutgers University.

The problems worsen each other, are intertwined and in the end hurt people, scientists said.

"Climate change and bio-

diversity loss are threatening human well-being as well as society," said report co-chair Hans-Otto Portner, a German biologist who helps oversee the impacts group of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Earth's naturally changing climate shaped what life developed, including humans, but once people in the industrialized world started pumping fossil fuels into the air, that triggered cascading problems, Portner said.

"It's a high time to fix what we got wrong," he said. "The climate system is off-track and the biodiversity is suffering." There are many

measures that can address both problems at once, the report said.

"Protecting and restoring high-carbon ecosystems," such as tropical forests and peatlands, should be high priority, said co-author Pete Smith, a plant and soil scientist at the University of Aberdeen.

While some climate solutions can increase species loss, scientists said efforts to curb extinctions don't really harm the climate.

Yunne Shin, director of research at French National Research Institute, said the bulk of measures taken to protect biodiversity will also help curb climate change. While she applauded

Associated Press



growing interest in nature-based solutions, she said, conservation measures "must be accompanied by clear cuts in emissions."

"This report is an important milestone," said Simon Lewis, chairman of global change science at University College London, who was not part of the report. "Finally the world's bodies that synthesize scientific information on two of the most profound 21st century crises are working together," he said. "Halting biodiversity loss is even harder than phasing out fossil fuel use." □



Editor

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Assistant Director

Xiomara Arends

Editors

Liza Koolman (Management assistant)

Richard Brooks

Linda Reijnders

Sales

Linda Reijnders

(linda.reijnders@cspnv.com)

Sulaika Croes

Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Pilar Flores

Columnists

Anthony Croes

Joris Zantvoort

Thais Franken

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800

E: news@arubatoday.com

W: www.arubatoday.com

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The unanswered 'Jeopardy!' question: Who's the new host?



This image released by Jeopardy! shows Alex Trebek, host of the game show "Jeopardy!"

Associated Press

By LYNN ELBER
AP Television Writer
LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Jeopardy!" needed a host, and Lucille Ball had an enthusiastic suggestion for creator Merv Griffin: The smooth-voiced, debonair emcee of the "High Rollers" game show. That was 1984. Decades later, filling the void left by the late Alex Trebek involves sophisticated research and a parade of guest hosts doing their best to impress viewers and the studio that's expected to make the call before the new season begins taping later this summer. Think of Sony Pictures Television as clutching the rose, and Mayim Bialik, Anderson Cooper, Katie Couric and "Jeopardy!" champs Ken Jennings and Buzzy Cohen among the suitors so far, with more to come including Robin Roberts, Dr. Sanjay Gupta and LeVar Burton. Sony has "the most robust team of people I have ever seen looking at

this and analyzing it in a very cerebral way," said executive producer Mike Richards. "It's a real change from the way casting has traditionally been done on television." "It's usually been a gut instinct of the head executive: 'How about that person?'" Richards said. That was producer-entertainer Griffin's approach when he brought a syndicated version of "Jeopardy!" to TV, five years after the quiz show's last network iteration wrapped in 1979 on NBC. A word from Ball, of "I Love Lucy" fame, and Trebek's skill and experience sealed his hire. Audience and critical regard for the Canadian-born Trebek grew over the years, which makes finding a worthy replacement both a gesture of respect for the late host and the means to protect a corporate asset. While ratings have shifted under the guest hosts, "Jeopardy!" remains among the top-ranked syn-

dedicated programs in viewership. Trebek helped build the show's "display of excellence with his own excellence. And it's tremendously difficult to find somebody to replace him, not only because of the status that he had in the American imagination," said Deepak Sarma, a Case Western Reserve University professor and Netflix cultural consultant. "Anyone who is going to take his position will be judged in the end against this model of perfection." Game show hosts of Trebek's era were usually radio and TV broadcasting veterans steeped in the genre, and almost invariably white men. Among the "Jeopardy!" subs are men and women of color and prospects from a variety of fields, including NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers. The approach makes sense to Louis Virtel, a longtime fan whose vantage point is informed by writing for a game show ("Match

Game") and competing on "Jeopardy!" in 2015. "It's great to see all these different fill-ins. I'm open to suggestions, and I think most people are," said Virtel, a "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" writer and co-host of the "Keep It" podcast. "Jeopardy!" is a one-of-a-kind show, and the replacement should be tailored to the game." What makes for a good "Jeopardy!" host? "I think establishing a sense of comfort (so) the audience just eases into the game," Virtel said. "Also a sense of stakes, that a real tough game is being played. It's called 'Jeopardy!' for a reason. The host is there to make sure we're all on our toes." The try-outs are an unusually public form of auditioning, one that could cause flop sweat even for veteran emcees. For actor Bialik of "Blossom," "The Big Bang Theory" and "Call Me Kat," any nerves were crowded out by the demands of the job — and she's a neuro-

scientist. "There is very little room for not being 100% dialed in to the job of hosting when you are on that stage," Bialik said in an email. It proved the most "joyful, challenging, transcendent act I have undertaken — second only to giving birth to my second son on the floor of my living room." Back in the day, there were only a handful of pioneers like Betty White, the first female game show host to win a Daytime Emmy (for 1983's "Just Men!"), and Adam Wade, a Black singer who hosted the 1975 game show "Musical Chairs." Wayne Brady, Steve Harvey and Meredith Vieira are among those who made further inroads, with pressure only growing on the entertainment industry to reflect America more broadly on screen. But taking over for an authority figure like Trebek is harder on women and others not typically seen in such roles, said Sarma. "The sorts of expectations placed on a person of color in a leadership position are usually higher than those placed on a white person in position of power," he said, and any error or "slight movement against the norm is jumped upon ... as some tremendous mistake." There could be backlash from those resentful that Trebek isn't replaced like-for-like, which Sarma he said isn't far-fetched in this period of social discord. "Sony is in a pickle," he said. Series producer Richards, the second temporary host after Trebek's pancreatic cancer death last November at age 80, holds an optimistic view despite the prospect of online trolls and whatever their gripes about the newbie may be. "My hope is that whoever is chosen will be given a chance to prove why they were chosen, without too much static," he said. "Ultimately, we are trying to put out the best product for our fans. That tends to narrow your focus to a pretty nice North Star, as opposed to, 'What's the internet going to say?'" □

Djokovic-Nadal, Tsitsipas-Zverev in French Open semifinals

By HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Tennis Writer

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal know there's something special about the two of them meeting in the French Open semifinals — even if they'd prefer, of course, for it to happen a round later.

"Each time we face each other, there's that extra tension and expectations," the top-seeded Djokovic said. "Just vibes are different walking on the court with him."

The third-seeded Nadal's take?

"In some way," he said, "we are practicing, we are living the sport, for these moments."

Whatever the quality of play might be between Nadal and Djokovic in Paris on Friday — their semifinal will follow the one between No. 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece and No. 6 Alexander Zverev of Germany — the numbers associated with the matchup are overwhelming.

Start with the big picture: Nadal is two wins away from his 21st Grand Slam title, which would break the men's mark he currently shares with Roger Federer. Djokovic is trying to get to No. 19, which would leave him just one behind his rivals.

Nadal is 105-2 at Roland Garros — Djokovic is responsible for one of those defeats, in the 2015 quarterfinals; Robin Soderling the other — and eyeing a



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after defeating Argentina's Diego Schwartzman in their quarterfinal match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros stadium Wednesday, June 9, 2021 in Paris.

14th championship at the clay-court major.

Djokovic won La Coupe des Mousquetaires in 2016 and could join Rod Laver and Roy Emerson as the only men to win each of the four Grand Slam tournaments twice.

"It's not like any other match. Let's face it, it's the biggest challenge that you can have — playing on clay against Nadal on this court, in which he has had so much success in his career," Djokovic said. "In the final stages of a Grand Slam, it doesn't get bigger than that."

It is their 58th showdown, more than between any other two men in the Open

era, which dates to 1968; Djokovic leads 29-28.

Nadal is ahead 10-6 at the Slams, 7-1 at the French Open (including a straight-set victory in the 2020 final) and 19-7 on clay (including a win in last month's Italian Open final).

This one comes in the semifinals, rather than the final, because Nadal recently slid from No. 2 to No. 3 in the rankings. The tournament seedings strictly follow the rankings, so Nadal got no boost for his dominance at the place, and a random draw determined which half of the bracket he was placed in.

"It's going to be a special match," said 10th-seeded

Diego Schwartzman, who lost to Nadal in the quarterfinals Wednesday but not before ending his 36-set winning streak in Paris. "Everyone wants to see that." The women's final Saturday is No. 31 seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova against unseeded Barbora Krejickova. The last four women all were first-time major semifinalists, and Pavlyuchenkova beat Tamara Zidansek, 7-5, 6-3, while Krejickova defeated No. 17 Maria Sakkari 7-5, 4-6, 9-7.

No matter what happens Friday, the men's final will be Old vs. New. That's because it will pit someone in his 30s who is one of the greatest ever —

Nadal, 35, or Djokovic, 34 — against someone in his 20s with plenty of potential but zero Grand Slam titles — Tsitsipas, 22, or Zverev, 24.

Tsitsipas vs. Zverev offers a glimpse of what the future of men's tennis could be. Both are all-court, all-surface players who are 6-foot-4 (1.93 meters) or taller. And both have now become regulars in the latter stages of majors.

"The Grand Slams, they're still a different animal. ... You got to learn how to play them, as well. Very rarely does anybody come in and, all of a sudden, perform his best at Grand Slams. Yes, we've seen Rafa do it, but Rafa is sometimes not human," Zverev said. "For young guys, it is a learning curve. Hopefully I can say that, slowly but surely, I'm starting to get the hang of it."

This is his third semifinal in the past five Slams, and he was the runner-up to Dominic Thiem at last year's U.S. Open.

It's the third major semifinal in a row and fourth overall for Tsitsipas, who is 0-3 so far.

"I feel privileged that I'm in that position, and I feel, obviously, I've put in a lot of daily hard work (that) has been a key element of me being here," Tsitsipas said after eliminating No. 2 seed Daniil Medvedev in the quarterfinals. "But, you know, my ego tells me I want more." □

Associated Press

Brady's Bucs focused on getting better, repeating as champs

By FRED GOODALL
AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — There's no room for complacency in Tom Brady's world. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers are hoping to become the first team to repeat as Super Bowl champions since Brady's 2003 and 2004 New England Patriots, and the 43-year-old quarterback doesn't want teammates taking anything for granted.

Although the Bucs will return all 22 starters after prioritizing keeping an ultra-talented roster together this offseason, Brady understands it'll take more than having familiar faces around him to win another Lombardi Trophy.

The seven-time Super Bowl winner said Wednesday that players have to resist any temptation to hold on to last year and assume "just because you did

something in February that you'll do it again next February because that's not the reality of football."

"I feel like we're not finished products. It was really our first opportunity to play together last year and there's a lot of opportunity for us to grow into something that could be very different," Brady added. "We've got to improve the things that we did well and we've got to certainly



Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady (12) throws a pass during an NFL football minicamp Tuesday, June 8, 2021, in Tampa, Fla.

Associated Press

build on a lot of things that we didn't do very well." □

Mets' Alonso claims MLB manipulating baseballs to harm FAs



New York Mets designated hitter Pete Alonso watches his ball while hitting a solo home run off Baltimore Orioles relief pitcher Travis Lakins Sr., during the ninth inning of a baseball game, Tuesday, June 8, 2021, in Baltimore.

By **NOAH TRISTER**
AP Baseball Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — New York Mets slugger Pete Alonso accused Major League Baseball of manipulating the baseballs to harm the earning potential for star free agents and players eligible for arbitration. Alonso's comments came Wednesday before New York's game at Baltimore. He was responding to a question about the crackdown on sticky substances used by pitchers. "I think that the biggest concern is that Major League Baseball manipulates the baseballs year in and year out depending on the free agency class — or guys being in an advanced part of their arbitration," Alonso said. "So I do think that's a big issue — the ball being different every single year. ... Maybe if the league didn't change the baseball, pitchers wouldn't need to use as much sticky stuff." When asked a follow-up question about this, Alonso remained firm. His implication was that the balls are friendlier to hitters in a year when a number of top pitchers are about to hit free agency — and vice versa.

"That's a fact," he said. "Guys have talked about it, but I mean, in 2019, there was a huge class of free agent pitchers, and then that's, quote-unquote, the juiced balls. Then 2020, it was a strange year with the COVID season, but now that we're back to playing like a regular season

with a ton of shortstops or position players that are going to be paid a lot of money, high-caliber players, I mean yeah, it's not a coincidence."

The league did not comment on Alonso's charge. MLB informed teams in February that it planned to slightly deaden the baseballs for the 2021 season following a years-long surge in home runs. In 2019, 3.6% of plate appearances ended in a homer, a number that has dropped to 3.1% this year.

Alonso hit 53 home runs as a rookie in that 2019 season and 16 in 57 games last year. He homered in the first inning Wednesday, his 10th of the season.

After the 2019 season, Gerrit Cole landed a \$324 million, nine-year deal with the New York Yankees, still a record contract for a pitcher in terms of its total value.

As far as the original question was concerned, Alonso did not seem terribly concerned with what opposing pitchers might be putting on the ball.

"Whatever they want to use to help control the ball, let them use it, because for me, I go in the box every single day, and I see guys throwing harder and harder every day, and I don't want 99 slipping out of someone's hand," Alonso said. Alonso said hitters have plenty of options to help their grip.

"On our on-deck bag, we have a pine tar rag, a pine tar stick, like a special sticky spray, rosin — I mean, you

name it, we have it," he said. "I wouldn't care if they had that behind the mound to help hold onto the ball."

Cole found himself immersed in the controversy last week when Minnesota Twins third baseman Josh Donaldson casually brought the pitcher's name up in an interview session, correlating a drop in Cole's spin rate with an anticipated crackdown on the sticky stuff by MLB.

Cole sidestepped the accusation on Tuesday, and Donaldson elaborated on the matter Wednesday to clarify that he's concerned about many more opponents in the game than just Cole. "With Gerrit Cole, he was the first guy to pitch since the suspensions happened and he's the first guy that you could see spin rates going down," Donaldson said. "There's been 12 or more guys already whose spin rates have magically dropped in the last week, so it's not just Gerrit Cole."

Donaldson said he believes the usage of grip aids has "got out of control" in the last few seasons.

"If you were to give \$100 fake counterfeit money to an experienced bank teller, right away within five seconds you're going to know that that's not real money," Donaldson said. "Just think about how many pitches I've seen in my career, think about Nelson Cruz, a lot of these guys who have seen a lot of pitches. We know when stuff's up."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Wednesday he's anticipating an "aggressive" crackdown at the major league level soon.

"It's gonna be a little bit different," he said.

Astros manager Dusty Baker noted Wednesday that pitchers have been using foreign substances "since the beginning of time." While Baker says he will adhere to whatever mandates come from the league, he's concerned about issues that could arise from stricter enforcement.

"Everybody's talking about

speed of the game," he said. "This is gonna slow the game down even more. So I don't know what we can do. I don't know how en-

forceable it is. And the umpires have enough to worry about doing just calling balls and strikes and outs and safe." □

Judge rejects effort to return MLB All-Star Game to Georgia

By **LARRY NEUMEISTER**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Manhattan judge on Thursday rejected an attempt to force Major League Baseball to return next month's All-Star Game to Atlanta. U.S. District Judge Valerie E. Caproni ruled against a not-for-profit organization representing small businesses, saying a lawsuit had failed to provide proof that its members have suffered any injuries by the decision to move the game.

The lawsuit filed May 31 alleged that Major League Baseball acted unconstitutionally when it moved the game from the Atlanta Braves stadium to Denver after Georgia Republicans enacted a restrictive new voting law.

According to the lawsuit, businesses in the Atlanta metro region would lose \$100 million in business because the All-Star Game would not be there.

The rewrite of Georgia's election rules followed former President Donald Trump's repeated unproven claims of fraud after his presidential loss to President Joe Biden.

Biden has declared the Georgia law "un-American" and "Jim Crow in the 21st century."

MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred has said he decided to move the All-Star events after discussions with individual players and the Players Alliance, an organization of Black players formed after the death of George Floyd last year.

Before ruling, Caproni verbally sparred for over an hour with attorney Howard Kleinhendler, making it clear that she thought there were no grounds for the lawsuit's claims and that his organization did not have standing to sue. After taking a brief break, Caproni made those findings from the bench.

The lawsuit had sought \$100 million in compensatory damages and \$1 billion in punitive damages. The lawyer said he represented the Washington-based Job Creators Network, described in the lawsuit as a nonpartisan organization supporting over 30 million businesses nationwide, including over 10,000 Georgia businesses.

He said his client supports the new Georgia election law.

At one point, Caproni said: "This case is not about whether the Georgia law is a good law or a bad law."

After Caproni made it clear through her questioning of Kleinhendler that she would rule against the lawsuit, attorneys for Major League Baseball and the MLB Players Association kept their arguments brief.

In ruling, Caproni said she had doubts whether Atlanta businesses could have suffered anything close to \$100 million in damages. She said the plaintiff further undermined its case when it suggested that Major League Baseball could remedy the harm by setting up a \$100 million relief fund for harmed businesses.

Such a fund, she noted, would make it hard to argue any harm would be irreparable. □